

A MODERN PETRUCHIO.

BY OLIVIA LOVELL WILSON, AUTHOR OF 'A LEGAL FETTER,' 'LUCK OF ASHMEAD,' 'A KNIGHT OF THE GARTER,' ETC.

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PART III.—A YEAR LATER.

CHAPTER VI.



CLAMOR of merry voices; a bouquet of sweet girl faces, bent over dainty bits of fancy work; the flash of jewels on white hands, and the flutter of pretty ribbons and laces.

Then a small gold thimble was tapped lightly on a table, and Ruth Myrick said:

"Girls, girls, we must have peace, or we shall never

bring order out of chaos—remember that."

In a moment, all was quiet, while every face turned eagerly toward the speaker. She had not changed much in the twelve months that had passed since we heard her make her humiliating confession to Katherine Gifford. Her beauty was heightened by an expression which formerly never softened the face of naughty Ruth Myrick; she had lost some of the rosy glow of lip and cheek. But it rather enhanced and refined her dark loveliness, and one saw there was still plenty of spirit and resolve in those black eyes and the curve of that resolute chin.

"If we must have two entertainments," she continued, addressing her attentive companions, "for the benefit of the hospital, we can have the theatricals later, and give our whole time to the fair now."

"Oh, yes," cried one girl, with enthusiasm: "because, if we wait until later, Fred will be home for the Easter holiday."

"That is well," smiled Ruth.

"And then," cried Madeline Owen, "Cousin Larry is coming back in about a week, and also Mr. Morris, Kate Gifford's old flame."

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"Rue knows all about that," said the first speaker; "she sees Kate Gifford quite often, and they write four times a week!"

"I must plead ignorance. Kate has been in New York for the last eight weeks. I am expecting her here every day, to make me a visit."

"Did you hear that she was coming with Mrs. Gifford to spend the winter at Elland?" asked Belle Martin, the first speaker.

"Yes," said Madeline Owen. "Larry wrote that Mr. Morris would only remain home two months, and would then return."

"Poor Kate," said Rue; "I am surprised that Mrs. Gifford wants to live at 'Elland.'"

"But your cousin, Madeline—will he return with Mr. Morris?"

"No, indeed!" said Madeline, dimpling with pleasure. "Laurence is coming home to take entire charge of the estate, and be the head of the family. Girls, you should see his picture. Such a mustache; and he is so handsome.

Don't you wish he were your cousin?"

"I'd rather be his friend!"

"Cousins do not count!"

"You cannot marry him; we can!"

"What, all of you?"

"Don't be boastful, Madeline!"

"My dear girls, you are enough to drive one wild," cried Rue, with her hands over her ears, as this storm arose. "Let us come sensibly back to the subject in hand. We shall be ready for our fair in a week."

"Wait a week longer, and our cousin will be home," laughed Belle Martin, with a sly glance at Madeline.

"Do as you think best about that," said Rue, her color varying a little.

"No, we defer to you, Rue," cried several voices.

"It matters very little to me. I should like to have Eric Morris's assistance for our theatricals. He is excellent in such things. We must be thinking of some good play."

"Oh, yes; what shall we have? Papa suggested 'Love in a Village' and 'The Wonder, or A Woman Keeps a Secret,' but I thought he was laughing at me, for I never heard of them."

"No, they are both old dramas. Nevertheless, he was making fun of you, Belle, for the titles are more applicable than the dramas, for our use," said Rue, smiling.

"Brother Tom said we ought to try Shakespeare—"

"Oh! oh!" from a chorus of shocked voices.

"Why not, girls?" asked Rue. "Some of the scenes are not so difficult."

"Yes, and Tom said you would make a lovely Katherine, Rue, in the play called 'Katherine and Petrucio.' I never read it; did you?" inquired the innocent girl, who evidently adored brother Tom.

A burst of irresistible laughter rippled forth, as Rue flushed hotly.

"Tell your brother to reserve his criticisms until he sees me in the role. But tell him, also, he will never be called upon to play Petrucio," she said, unable to refrain from laughing at the puzzled expression on little Nellie Leland's face. She, in turn, grew as rosy as Rue, as she exclaimed, to their further amusement:

"I am sure Tom meant it as a compliment. He admired Rue very much before he was married!"

"As if we did not all know that at one time Tom Leland would have given his eyes to win Rue," laughed Belle to Nellie, as they were putting on their wraps.

"I am sorry if I repeated something unkind. I never remember—oh! I am so sorry!"

"Never mind—your brother won't; and Rue never bears a grudge. Besides, she has Dick Olcott and his fortune at her beck and call."

Rue sat thoughtful, alone, after the last sweet maid had kissed her fondly and departed.

So, she mused, Laurence Owen was coming back; cured, no doubt, of his youthful folly in loving her. A changed being, with different views of life. She should never again see the youthful face that had grown white at her cruel words. She could call up no other vision of him than that pale sad one. How could she meet and greet him, knowing he had received and scorned her repentant appeal? How he must have loathed her, to resist those burning words. She dragged herself through the whole valley of humiliation, as she sat in the already lengthening twilight of the early spring. She could not see the fire burning low on the hearth for bitter tears, when a hand was placed over her eyes, and a warm kiss fell on her cheek. Springing gladly to her feet, "Kate, Kate, you darling!" she cried, and was folded in Miss Gifford's arms.

"You did not get my note?" asked Kate, as, VOL. XCV.—26.

the first joyous confusion over, she laid aside her cloak.

"It may be here. Con brought the mail, and I forgot to look at it after the girls left. When did you come, Kate?"

"At five-thirty. And, Rue dear, I have such a request to make. I know you will think me mad."

"I will try to suppress any opinion until I am positive."

"Well, you know, mamma is to come to 'Elland' to-morrow. The house is all in order, and the servants there now. I want to sleep at 'Elland' one night before mamma arrives, and I want you to come with me to-night. Don't refuse me, Rue. We have just time to drive over before dinner. I telegraphed they should have dinner ready at seven. Come, dear, don't say no." Kate spoke pleadingly.

"What whim is this, my wise woman?" demanded Ruth.

"Call it a whim, or what you will, I shall not tell you until I get you there."

"Is it true Eric will be back so soon?"

"He will arrive in New York harbor in three days. Larry is with him. Answer, Rue—will you go to Elland with me?"

"I suppose I must submit. Besides, papa is away, and it is a temptation to escape myself to-night, and the possibility of a visit from honest lumbering Dick Olcott, whom my father seems to think a valuable attachment for life. I wish I could do more than like him a very little."

"Pshaw! Rue, remember the old saw, and don't marry a dull man because he is good. But run, put on your warm cloak, for the air is keen, in spite of its being April. Can you take the doughty Conrad with you, and have him remain also?"

"More and more mystery. Kate, what do you want of Con the irrepressible?"

"Wait and see!"

With this vague promise, Ruth was forced to be content, as she sped away to make ready for the drive and send word to Conrad Mulligan, who had become a domestic in the Myrick household within the last year.

They were soon on their way to "Elland," Rue persistently haunted by memories of her last drive thither, and Kate quiet, but evidently a little nervous.

They found the house warm and pleasant, and the servants ready with an eager welcome. A dainty dinner was served, during which they discussed many matters, but Kate avoided all explanation of her strange request, and Rue

sought to conceal her curiosity. After dinner, Kate said :

"I have a fancy for spending the rest of the evening in my room, or the one I have chosen as mine. Conrad can bring our tea there when we ring for it."

"Very well; but why should Con be our cup-bearer?"

"Another whim, Rue. I like his honest countenance," laughed Kate, but she did not conceal her nervousness.

"Alas! he never succeeds in speaking the truth. Honesty, he thinks, is not his best policy," sighed Rue, as she followed Kate up the broad stairs. Thus, it may be seen, Con's veracity had not increased with his years.

Kate led the way to the room in which hung the first Mrs. Morris's picture.

The old-fashioned furniture had not been altered, but various little touches of modern comfort bespoke the handiwork of Kate's maid. Two cosy willow rockers were drawn up to a crackling wood-fire, laid upon shining brass andirons. This brought their chairs directly opposite the portrait, which hung over the high wooden mantel.

Rue sank comfortably into her seat.

"This is delightful," she said. "Wait until you have entered Paradise entirely—an old maid's Paradise. Did you not have Fanny put your tea-gown in your valise?"

"Oh, yes; and see, your good Mary has laid yours and mine ready. New for the luxury of China silk and slippers, instead of the perfume of hot-house flowers and the compliments of men! I am getting so, I hate hot-house posies and—"

"Not men, Rue—surely you were not going to say that!"

"Yes, and I mean it. They are just like the posies, the perishable delight of an hour, and then you have exhausted them."

"Dick Oloott, perhaps," replied Kate, sententiously; "but Eric—"

"Oh, we always except Eric!"

By this time, both were clad in the soft folds of the silk tea-gowns, Rue in a rosy glow of color, while Kate's blonde beauty shone like a moonbeam in contrast with the ivory-tinted dress. Sitting before the fire, in comfortable attitudes, Kate rang for the tea-tray.

Conrad brought it in, and to him Kate said:

"Con, when I ring, do you come yourself."

Conrad bowed and departed.

"And now, Rue," said Kate, as they sipped their tea from dainty china, "I will gratify your curiosity. When Eric left here, a year ago, it was with the firm belief that his father had made a second will, that was not forthcoming."

"What did Eric think became of this will, pray?" asked Rue, lazily.

"He hardly knew what to think, but he was sure his father had not left him penniless, after having so freely forgiven him the past. Not long ago, he had a strange dream. Of course, you know the codicil of the old will left him his mother's picture."

"Yes," said Rue, as Kate paused, "what a sweet face she had." Both looked silently at the picture a moment, then Kate continued:

"I will read you what Eric says of his dream, in his own words."

She drew a letter from her pocket.

"You remember my writing you Laurence and Eric left the expedition sometime ago, and had been making a walking tour through Italy. They have slept in all sorts of odd places, even on the ground, wrapped in rubber blankets. Fancy Laurence exposed in this manner; but you do not know how his aunts coddled him. Well, this is what Eric writes:

"'Last night, we slept at a small inn on the road not far from Naples. As usual, I was thinking, before I fell asleep, of my darling'—oh, horror! I did not mean to read that part. 'I was just falling into a doze, when I found myself at Elland. I seemed to be sleeping in the bed that stands just opposite my mother's portrait. I gazed at the picture as I lay there, until the tears rolled down my cheeks. Then I thought my mother came into the room, sat down by the bed, and smiled at me. She put her hand on my head and said:

"'My son, you wish for riches; what would you do if you had your desire?"

"I replied quickly: 'Marry my sweet Kate, mother.' She smiled again and kissed me. 'And is this your only wish that wealth would gratify?' I thought a moment, and said: 'No, mother dear, I would do something, also, to make your memory prized by all the world.' But she shook her head, still smiling. 'And nothing for the glory of God, my son?' she asked. At this, I seized her hand and kissed it, just as I used to do long ago. 'Yes, mother,' I cried, 'my whole life shall glorify His name. I will strive to be faithful, and use my money in His service, with a thankful heart for all His mercies.' And then I thought she kissed me over and over again, and, leaving me, went to the picture, and, lifting it from the wall, stood gazing at me, until I saw her no more, and awoke with my face wet with tears. The dream has haunted me ever since, but has comforted me ever since. It has reminded me how unworthy I am to have great wealth placed in

my hands, and that God knows best. And, if I can only make you my wife, dear Kate, I shall try and trust Him more and more, and forget the hard past, and live with purer, more unselfish, motives. Ah, Kate, dear Kate, teach me to bow to Him and be patient.'"

Kate paused, her voice trembling, and Ruth winked away the drops shining in her lovely eyes.

"And now," said Kate, after a moment's silence, "can you imagine what all this has to do with our being here?"

"No. I confess I am still in ignorance."

"I will tell you." Kate rose excitedly. "I want to look behind that picture. I have not rested since I got this letter. I first worried about Eric. One will be a little superstitious, and he had this dream just before his setting sail for America. But like an inspiration came the thought of examining the picture. Mr. Morris was very eccentric the last few months of his life. He died in this room, unwilling as mamma had been to come here. Eric vows his father was afraid of mamma, and in awe of your father's advice. I came to-night to examine the picture. Mamma once here would oppose me, or ridicule my folly, if it prove folly. I asked you to bring Conrad because the other servants would talk it over, and mamma hear of it. I will bribe Con to silence. May I ring for him?"

"Do as you think best," said Rue. Never had she seen Katherine so moved. Her lovely face was brilliant, and her eyes shone like stars.

Kate directed Con to bring a step-ladder. She said she fancied the cord of the picture over the mantel was very weak, and she wanted the picture taken down. Con returned in a few moments, and was soon on the ladder.

The portrait was almost full-length, and the frame of heavy gilt.

"Carefully, Con," warned Kate, as the picture swayed when he attempted to lift it. A cloud of dust rose as he stirred it on its hook.

"It is mutherin' heavy!" quoth Con, as step by step he lowered it to the floor. The girls were eagerly examining the back of the picture, when Conrad exclaimed:

"Luk at the little cupboard in the wall, will you, now! Ain't it a dandy place for kapin' secrets!"

Kate looked up and gave a cry of delight. In the wall, directly where the picture had hung, was a small closet. In a moment, Kate had mounted the ladder. She wrenched open the little door with eager hands, drew out a folded paper, and then fairly flew down the ladder, waving the document over her head.

"He knew, if Eric had the picture, he had everything. Oh! how foolish we were, not to understand him! See—see—Rue, it is the latest will, and I have found it—have found it!"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. MYRICK aided Kate in all the arrangements business entailed by the discovery of the later will. He found that the document was legally drawn by a lawyer unknown to him, that he was no longer executor or legatee. He even sent the dispatch apprising Eric of his good fortune in being his father's sole heir. He saw that the witnesses were forthcoming, and heard the lawyer from New York affirm his work in the drawing of the will. No stone was left unturned to authenticate the document.

Then, while Kate waited eagerly and blissfully her lover's arrival, Mr. Myrick confronted the ruin that stared him in the face. He had speculated, and lost heavily. Up to the time of Mr. Morris's death, he had been in great anxiety; his property, even the house he lived in, which was Ruth's in her mother's right, was heavily mortgaged. The Owen estate held this mortgage. When, however, he became executor of the Morris estate, and legatee as well, he was able to borrow on the prospect of his legacy, and thus tided over his danger. So, with the old fever for speculation strong upon him, he sent the other half of his anticipated legacy after an unlucky venture, thinking to redeem the first sum. He fared as well as men sometimes do, and, now that the later will placed all the management of the estate in Eric Morris's hands, Mr. Myrick was aghast at the condition of his own affairs. Nor was he quite ready to account to Eric for his year of stewardship. That element in his nature that grasped, and, if failing the first time, reached in another way to attain his end, was, in his old age, gratified at the expense of his character for scrupulous honesty, and he acknowledged his error in the face of this new discovery, and trembled at the thought of exposure or disgrace.

But still more did he lament for his child. If Rue were only well married! How could he endure that ruin should overwhelm his darling! Mr. Myrick felt, if she was safe, he might yet extricate himself without encountering so ugly a word as disgrace!

Amidst all this, he suddenly remembered who held the mortgage, now that the Owen estate had passed to the heir. Laurence Owen had been very much in love with Rue at one time. Why should he not return and still find her charming? He would, it is true, be at the

mercy of these two young men, Laurence Owen and Eric Morris, but he had been an old friend in both families. Would they deal harshly with him? Youth was apt to be both rash and stern. Still, he would bide his time. Then there was young Dick Olcott—perhaps Rue would accept him, and he would give his father-in-law the assistance he needed. Drowning men catch at straws. Mr. Myrick sent for his daughter to come to him in the library.

Rue had just completed her toilette for the evening, and was about to depart to the fair for the hospital fund, when she received her father's message. She had been so hard to please in her dress, that her maid was in despair, and the delay caused by many alterations had detained her until very late. In spite of the lovely dress and rich jewels she wore, she had a dissatisfied look in her eyes and a little pettishness in her manner as she entered the library. Mr. Myrick gazed at her fondly.

"Well, papa," she said, "tell me quickly what you wish, for I am very late. I have charge of the flower-booth with Kate."

"I have intended speaking to you for days—ever since this affair of the will transpired, and since Eric Morris's return," he answered, slowly.

"Will not to-morrow do?"

"I should prefer speaking to-night. I will not keep you long. Has young Olcott spoken yet?"

She cast a half-indignant glance on him.

"No. Nor do I intend he ever shall have the opportunity," she said, coolly.

"Do you know you already have an unenviable reputation for being a jilt?" He spoke sharply. He was very much harassed, and, moreover, fancied he detected contempt for his motive in her tone.

Her face burned hotly, but she only flashed on him a glance of pained surprise, and said quietly:

"Nevertheless, I shall not try to change that reputation by accepting Mr. Olcott."

"I beg your pardon, Rue. I was rude. I spoke hastily," he replied, proud of the firm tone and dignity of speech in his daughter; "but, my dear girl, something must be done soon, and I should gladly see you accept Dick Olcott."

"Are you tired of me?" she asked, sharply.

"No, no, my daughter, not that. But you are old enough—"

"But, if I should never marry," she interrupted. "I am tired of it—all. I find no man who will not bow down and kiss my shoe-

lace, and I—can never marry the man whom I do not respect—and—"

"My dear child! I would not have you do so. Only listen while I explain something very sad to you."

And then he told her as much as he dared of his affairs, cleverly making it clear that her marriage with Dick Olcott would be an untold advantage.

She left him, bewildered and shocked. All the way to the hall, she was meditating on what he had told her. And to think her father owed Eric Morris, and, worse still, Laurence Owen! She felt Eric would understand, and try to alleviate her father's trouble; but Laurence—ah! why should he show kindness? This debt must be paid. House, home, jewels, all must go, that this money might be forthcoming. Life meant luxury to Ruth Myrick. She could only think of poverty as she had encountered it once or twice in her Sunday-school work—wretched ill-smelling houses, dirty streets, and sad-eyed women. Even marriage with Dick Olcott would be better than this! She shuddered, and drew her warm cloak about her, and thought of honest Dick's loving eyes, and sighed. Oh! that she could feel, for him, what surged through her heart when she wrote that hapless wild appeal over a year ago!

She was very late in arriving at the hall. The busy hum of voices, gay strains of music, greeted her as she threw aside her wraps and hastened to join Kate in the flower-booth.

"Rue, you are here at last!" cried Belle Martin, rushing up to kiss her. "Give me some change for a dollar, Kate. Ruth, you ought to see Madeline Owen. She is at the Oriental booth, and making such a goose of herself over Larry Owen."

"He is her cousin—" began Rue.

"Fiddlesticks! but you should see him! He has improved so much! But oh, I see Dick Olcott making his way toward you," and Belle tripped off, while Rue turned to greet Mr. Olcott.

All the evening, Rue continued to be the recipient of pretty confidences about Laurence Owen.

Eric came for Kate later in the evening, and she reluctantly left Rue in charge of the booth.

"She is not well to-night," said thoughtful Kate, as she moved away on Eric's arm to make a tour of inspection through the hall.

"Has she seen Laurence?"

"No. He came and talked with me awhile before Rue got here. How changed he is. Did he ever speak of that letter she wrote him?"

"No. You bound me to silence unless he

should refer to it. He has scarcely mentioned her name during our absence."

"You think he has got over his love?"

"I do not believe he cares a fig for her. But he seemed to leave his youth in Brompton."

It was quite late in the evening, and Rue was bending over her flowers.

To the disgust of Olcott, she had sent that gentleman and Belle Martin away on some pretext, and, although glad of this reprieve from his presence, Rue was feeling a little forlorn, when a tall figure stood before her, and she heard a voice whose cadence she had never forgotten say in a pleasant genial way:

"I want two bunches of roses, red and white, if you please. Ah! Miss Myrick, have you no welcome for me?"

She knew she murmured something and extended her hand, but she did not study the change in the handsome face before her, until his pleasant voice sounded again, as he bent to select his flowers.

Only the voice remained to remind her of the boy who had been her luckless wooer. This man, with the frank eyes and genial manner, the dark mustache drooping over a firm mouth and chin, the easy confidence of assured position, had no place in her memory. He said as he selected his roses:

"They are for my aunts. And I believe you have never met them. Can you leave your duties here long enough to go the length of the hall with me? We are such old friends, you should grant me that pleasure."

A thrill of delight swept through Rue. His very voice sent hope and joy to her heart. She left Belle Martin and Mr. Olcott in charge of the booth, they having returned opportunely, and then passed down the hall on Laurence Owen's arm.

Mr. Owen led his lovely companion to the Oriental booth, where the Misses Owen had been accommodated with chairs. They were very fine-looking old ladies. Rue felt more drawn to Miss Annie. Miss Jean had such keen eyes, and she looked Rue through and through, as the girl answered Miss Annie's gentle questions. Laurence exchanged merry badinage with his cousin Madeline, and seemed indifferent as to the impression Rue was making on his relatives.

"You must come and see us, my dear," said Miss Annie, retaining Rue's hand a moment as she bade her good-bye. "We are two old ladies who make few visits, but we will be glad to see you in South Walsingham."

"Thank you," said Rue, almost shyly.

"I think they made a mistake in not placing you at this booth, instead of Madeline," said Miss Jean. "You are far more of the gypsy type, and have proved your title by stealing my sister's heart. I do not need to add my persuasions to hers for an early visit," and she smiled, and the smile was so like Laurence's, it proved the only pleasant memory of her that remained with Rue.

Laurence conducted her back, and, as they went down the long hall, he said, after a pause:

"Miss Myrick, I trust you will call upon my aunts. They will appreciate the attention. Then there is something else I should like to say. A little over a year ago, I was foolish enough to put you to the trouble of refusing me. I also, in my boyish passion, felt sore over what I have lived to see was very wise and prudent on your part. I hope you have forgotten all that passed then, and that we meet as sincere friends."

Oh! the pain of those smooth glib words! She felt her hand tremble on his arm, and involuntarily clutched her fingers upon his coat-sleeve. All the glad hope called forth by his tone a moment before seemed crushed forever. She tried to steady her lips, but they quivered as she replied:

"Grant me also a modicum of youthful folly, in my manner of refusing you."

"It is a bargain, then," he said, cheerily. "We cry 'quits,' and are friends. Thank you very much. And now I have safely convoyed you once more to your own domain. Queen of hearts and roses!"

He spoke lightly as he bowed with a little mock deference, and she passed into the flower booth. He lingered, however, to chat with Belle Martin, not failing to hear Mr. Olcott's reproachful tone as he accosted Rue, and her low reply. It did not escape Laurence that she looked pale and weary. Mr. Olcott, however, evidently had his grievance, and it was not hard to see that Miss Myrick was becoming more vexed every moment. She appeared to be busily arranging her flowers as she answered him, and she made a heedless stretch across a large candelabrum. The flame flared, caught the evergreen twined about the base, and blazed up.

Laurence sprang to the rescue, but saw with dismay that Rue's sleeve, of a light fabric, was also on fire. Frightened cries rang through the hall, then all was confusion and excitement.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A TALE OF A TALE.

BY MRS. J. M. OAKLEY.



"MILY," said my sister, as I entered the breakfast-room, one sunshiny June morning, "look what the postman has left for you." And she held up a large square envelope.

"Evidently an invitation to another college commencement," I said, languidly, as I sank into my chair. "I found a gray hair this morning, and I attribute it entirely to the commencement season. Essays on Protoplasmic Energy and orations on The Moral Uses of Pessimism are too much for my poor brain. You needn't hand it to me, Kate—I have forsworn the learned young graduate."

"Well, this will not compel you to resort to hair-dyes," said Kate, as she scrutinized the seal anew. "If I am not mistaken, this is the monogram of Mrs. Thompson Tyler."

"Mrs. Thompson Tyler?" I exclaimed, taking the envelope and breaking the seal with an eager hand.

Mrs. Thompson Tyler! The very name suggested an atmosphere of elegance and gayety. Mrs. Thompson Tyler was the autocrat of our village, the dictator of our social customs, the arbiter of our social destinies. She had the handsomest house in the village, and entertained with a lavish hand. Her husband, some years before, had been elected to Congress by the dominant party, and had served his country in Washington for two successive terms. Since then, Mrs. Tyler had wielded a still greater influence over our village affairs. She shed around her the aroma of our national capital: she could discourse fluently of Cabinet Ministers and Ministers Plenipotentiary; her house was adorned with souvenirs of her Washington sojourn, and she delighted to tell which Mr. Secretary had particularly admired this or that elegant trifle. It can be imagined, then, how potent throughout Smithville was the name of Mrs. Thompson Tyler. Not to know her was, in an intensified sense, to argue yourself unknown, and anyone so unfortunate as to incur her disapproval was straightway dropped from every visiting-list in town.

What wonder then that, as I scanned the

dainty epistle, visions of pleasure rose up before my eyes.

"It is to be a garden-party! How perfectly delightful—"

"I ought to tell you," said Kate, interrupting my exclamations of delight, "that Charlie Tyler is at home. I saw him yesterday, but didn't mention it—for I knew you wouldn't be interested in such a trifle." And she looked up mischievously, while I felt my cheeks redden.

"Of course the party is for him, then," said mamma. "We must arrange to have you go, Nell." And she sighed, knowing the restricted state of our finances.

"If Charlie Tyler is to be there, I shall not go looking like a fright," I exclaimed, bitterly, a great wave of disappointment breaking over me.

Charlie and I had been chums before he went abroad, four years ago, and I had caught myself many a time thinking a great deal more about him than circumstances warranted. Of course, he had forgotten me, a little country-girl, long ago.

"Well, there is no use saying anything more about it," I said, waking from a reverie in which Charlie Tyler, lawn-fêtes, and new dresses were mingled in charming confusion. "My white dress is hopelessly done for; and, as I never had, and never expect to have, any other party-dress, the sooner I make up my mind to it, the better."

"If there were only something of mine you could use," said mamma, looking unhappy over the knowledge that her one company-gown was an old black silk, so mended and turned and twisted that, every time she wore it, we expected to see it go to pieces before our eyes.

"If you could only have one of those lovely white sateens," said Kate; "only twenty cents a yard, and so pretty and stylish."

"There is no use talking about 'only twenty cents a yard'; for, if the whole dress-pattern were 'only twenty cents,' I couldn't get it," I said, feeling that fate was using me very hardly indeed.

If I only could do something to help make the living, had been my cry ever since I had left school. But, in a little village like Smithville, what could a girl do? The teachers in the public school had held their positions so long and were so satisfactory, that it was hopeless to

think of supplanting any one of them. I had talked of opening a kindergarten for the little children, but could not get the promise of enough patrons to warrant any outlay in learning the system. Smithville did not take kindly to educational novelties. As to painting plaques, fans, and china cups, I had no ability that way, and did not attempt it. Things were so desperate, that I was willing to sacrifice my pride and become a milliner or a dressmaker; but there were already more of both than Smithville could support.

There was simply nothing to be done but to settle down and be a burden on papa, who had enough depending on him, as it was.

We were all more or less pinched in Smithville, with the exception of a few families, so no one thought the worse of us for doing our own work and turning our dresses; but it seemed just now as if, turn and twist as we might, we could barely draw together those implacable "two ends."

"Yes," I repeated to Kate, as we were making the beds that morning, "I shall have to give up the idea of that lawn-party, and of every other party, too, this summer, thanks to Dr. Green's awkwardness, though I don't believe that dress would have held together through another washing, anyhow."

"Well, it does seem hard that you can't go, when it is really Charlie Tyler's party, and you and he such friends," said my young sister, sympathetically.

"I doubt if he remembers my existence," I replied, a lively hope in my heart giving the lie to my words.

Kate answered the door-bell just then, and came back with a paper which had been pushed under the door.

"Here is your opportunity!" she cried, waving a copy of the Weekly Gossiper under my eyes. "The editor asks for original short stories, and promises to pay liberally for those accepted."

"What has that to do with me?" I asked, slapping a pillow vigorously.

"Now, you know," said Kate, "you have a lively fancy, and are always making up stories for the children—why can't you set to work and write one for this paper?"

"I never could do it in the world," I said, aghast.

"Oh! but you could," said Kate; "you could surely write a story as good as this," and she began reading aloud one of the weekly sentimental narratives.

"That is pretty bad," I admitted: "but I doubt if I could do as well," though, at the

same time, my mind began groping about for a possible plot.

Kate kept urging me all day; she knew I could do it, while mamma said nothing but: "It will do no harm to try."

The day was a busy one. There was fruit to put up, the week's ironing to do, one of the boys' trousers to mend—there always was a pair of trousers to mend—and callers to entertain. We had more callers than usual that day, for everyone in our set was excited at the prospect of the lawn-fête, and several of the girls came to talk it over. But, while ironing, shelling peas, washing dishes, or talking to visitors, my mind kept running on my story.

After the children were all in bed, I sat down with mamma and Kate by the sitting-room table, and began to talk over my plot.

"Of course, I must have lovers. She, beautiful but poor—he, rich—"

"That will never do," cried Kate. "King Cophetua is played out."

"Well, then, how is this: She, rich and elegant. He, a groom in her father's service." Murmured applause from my critics.

"She rides daily in the park. He accompanies her. Her esthetic eye pleased with his manly beauty. She invites his confidence. His modest yet learned conversation enslaves her attention. One day, her horse takes fright. She is about to be thrown. He rushes—"

"Too hackneyed," remarked my mentors.

"Here is another: Stern parent observes her partiality. Discharges groom. Great bunch of roses daily left at her door. Mystery deepens. Months elapse. Roses continue. No groom. Stern parent fails. Poverty stares them in the face. She tries the stage. Sees groom in the audience. Faints amid great applause. Revives in the green-room, to find groom bending over her. No groom after all, but English lord. Orange-flowers. Diamonds. Voyage to England. How does that strike you, my critics?"

"It is not any more improbable than many of the stories one reads," said mamma, mildly, but Kate cried out:

"Capital! It is sure to succeed."

"And now," added my enthusiastic coadjutor, "I'll do your share of the work to-morrow, and you work as hard as you can."

Two weeks were to elapse before the fête, so I hoped to be able to finish my story in two days, and, by allowing a week in which to hear from the editor, would still have time—should fate and the editor prove propitious—to manufacture the much-desired dress.

How I toiled at my desk for the next two days—and nights, too, for that matter—for I consumed not a little midnight oil. Fortunately, the stories were expected to be short, originality and a certain liveliness of style being the requisites; so, by the end of the second day, I had brought my hero and heroine all through their trials, and dispatched them across the seas to a long-deferred but perpetual honeymoon. With a trembling hand, I folded up my manuscript, and, not without a twinge at the number of stamps it required, entrusted it the post-office. The manuscript being gone, hope, which had buoyed me up so far, promptly departed also. My spirits sank to the lowest level. I felt that I had made a laughing-stock of myself, and my fancy pictured vividly the smile of derision which would light up the editorial countenance at the sight of my unhappy production.

"It was a waste of time, paper, and stamps, and I'll never hear from it again," I reiterated, dolefully.

Mamma and Kate stood my solid comforters, Kate particularly—asserting over and over, with the ardor of sixteen, what a good story it was, and how superior to the generality of the Gossiper's contents.

The week I had allotted for the examination of my manuscript ebbed slowly away, and no word from the editor. I sent to the post-office three times a day, till finally the postmaster asked if Miss Nellie were expecting a love-letter, she seemed so anxious. Eight days elapsed, nine days, and then I gave it up in earnest.

"I should have heard long ago," "I couldn't get the dress made in time now, anyhow," and "Please don't say anything more about it."

On the afternoon of the tenth day, my little brother came bounding in with "Here's the letter for you, Nell!" My heart thumped violently as I took it. It was assuredly from the Gossiper; the address was in the upper left-hand corner, and the whole aspect was official. My hand trembled so, I could scarcely open the envelope. Mamma looked up sympathetically from her mending, and Kate, her hands stained and dripping with the fruit she was preparing for supper, hopped up and down in her excitement. As I nervously unfolded the letter, a scrap of paper fluttered to the floor.

"A check!" cried Kate, snatching it with her sticky hands.

And then how we hugged each other in delight! It was several minutes before my happiness allowed me to read the letter or even to look at the check. The editor wrote

briefly that the story was accepted, and that he enclosed a check for ten dollars.

Ten dollars! It seemed a fortune to us all. In an hour's time, mamma and I had gone down-town, cashed the check, purchased the pretty white sateen, and were at home cutting it out.

I never knew ten dollars to do so much. By mamma's careful management, it bought not only my white sateen, but a pretty blue one for Kate, new gloves for the garden-party, and a little fresh lace to lighten up mamma's old silk.

Mamma had practical ideas about dress-making; and, with her help, I had, in the two days' time, as pretty a costume as I cared to see. I drew the last stitch just in time to dress for the fête. As I took a parting survey of myself, I felt that I had never looked prettier. The creamy material fell around me in graceful folds; dainty crêpe-lisse softened the outline at neck and wrist; a cluster of jacqueminot roses out of my own garden shone darkly at my waist; and, altogether, I did not envy even a queen.

The fête was a great success; the weather was perfect, the moon full, and the stars fairly outshone by the Chinese lanterns that radiated their brilliant hues from every tree. The girls said my dress was lovely, and the boys crowded around, entreating for the privilege of a dance. As for Charlie Tyler, he came up as soon as we entered the house, shook our hands warmly, and said more nice things than I can remember, about his pleasure in seeing old friends again. He kept close by me nearly all evening, and claimed more dances than anyone else, saying that he had four years' dancing to make up. How could I be anything else but happy? It was not only that Charlie was Mrs. Tyler's only son and a great catch—he was the kindest and most generous-hearted boy in the whole world; and I had always been fond of him. Moreover, during the four years he had been abroad studying medicine, he had won no end of praise and fame, and all Smithville was proud of him.

Well, the fête came to an end, as the loveliest fête must come; but Charlie insisted upon walking home with me, and wanted to know how soon he might call. Kate, the dear girl, had sat up for me, in her eagerness to hear all about Charlie, and we had such satisfaction talking it all over.

I was very tired, the next day, after so much expectation and sewing and dancing, but not too tired to be pleased when Charlie came to take me to drive. Even now it is a pleasure to look back on the four weeks that followed the fête.

Charlie called at our house nearly every day

on some pretext or another, and soon without any pretext at all. His homecoming was made the occasion of a perfect round of gayety. Picnics, tennis, boating, and driving parties followed each other in rapid succession. Our little society had never been in such a whirl.

One evening, there was to be a moonlight picnic in a pretty grove just at the edge of town, and Charlie called for me as usual. Something had happened to hinder my dressing, and I was obliged to keep him waiting for a few minutes. When I entered the parlor, I found papa and Charlie in an animated discussion over the tendencies of recent fiction. My entrance stopped the conversation; but, when we were well on our way, Charlie began again:

"I admit the influence for good which the highest class of fiction must always exert; but consider the number of stories—foolish, illogical, and false—with which, weekly and monthly, the country is flooded! They are not only silly—and silliness would be bad enough—but they are absolutely pernicious. They give to young readers thoroughly wrong ideas of life. And think of the appalling popularity of the stuff! Take, for instance, the *Weekly Gossiper*—a number was thrown in at our door this morning, or I should never have known there was such a paper—it claims to have a circulation up in the hundreds of thousands, and I have no doubt it can verify its claim. It furnishes to all those readers a weekly supply of enfeebling literature, narratives of impossible events couched in schoolboy English. I glanced through one of its stories, and found it a type of its class. A millionaire's daughter becomes enamored of a handsome, cultivated, refined, and generally impossible groom, whereupon the father dismisses the groom, the only sensible thing in the story. The millionaire becomes impoverished, the daughter goes on the stage, and, by some sort of hocus-pocus—the author is not very clear on this point—the groom turns up as an English lord, and the inevitable marriage concludes the absurd narrative. Now, the effect of such twaddle is to encourage girls to flirt with grooms and to teach disrespect to parents; for the father is represented as stubbornly in the wrong from beginning to end. I tell you, the person who poisons the mind with such perilous stuff

is just as guilty as he who would scatter strychnine in the market-place."

I walked along during this outburst with averted head, thankful that the friendly night could veil my burning cheeks.

A poisoner! I shuddered. But how could my little tale produce such awful results? Surely, Charlie had exaggerated. Perhaps—and the thought nearly deprived me of motion—perhaps he had discovered that I was the author of that miserable story, and had taken this way of letting me know his opinion of it and me. I glanced down at my pretty dress with loathing. What had it not cost me? I dared not open my lips for fear my trembling voice would betray my feelings; but, fortunately, Charlie was too much carried away by his subject and his indignation to heed my silence.

When we arrived at the picnic-ground, it must suddenly have occurred to him that I had not said a word since we started; for he led me under a lamp and gazed searchingly into my pallid face. If I looked as I felt, I must have been ghastly indeed. Charlie, evidently alarmed, made me sit down, brought me some coffee, and was assiduous in his attentions. I tried to rally my scattered forces and take my usual share in the fun, but in vain. At last, I pleaded a sudden headache, and started for home.

Of course, Charlie accompanied me, and was profuse in his sympathy; but I was too much in a daze to understand what he said. Finally, I made out that he was mingling words of love and condolence, and I said bitterly:

"Take care what you say to a poisoner!"

"A poisoner?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes. Isn't that what you called me?"

"What I called you? Why, my darling, what are you thinking of? Tell me," he said, drawing me tenderly to his side: "What did I say that could be so misinterpreted by my little sweetheart?"

And then, in his arms, and soothed by his caresses—for we were on our porch by this time—I sobbed out the whole story.

I could tell how he laughed at and consoled with me; how he complimented my ingenuity and berated his own stupidity, how he soothed and caressed me—but why spoil the old, old story?